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NOTE TO: DCI

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You expressed interest last week in  
Senator Durenberger's Press Club remarks.

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Charles A. Briggs

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# Senator Dave Durenberger

U.S. Senator for Minnesota

REMARKS OF  
SENATOR DAVE DURENBERGER  
BEFORE  
THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

MARCH 26, 1985

Some years ago, a senior United States government official was reported to have told a South American diplomat that the "axis of history" ran from Moscow through Berlin and London to New York, and did not encompass Latin America.

That narrow vision of international politics is no longer held by most informed people. Today, as never before, people in this country are following with intense interest developments in the nations of Central and South America.

But if we are interested, we are also confused, for we lack a frame of reference which can tell us what kind of policy to pursue. Our government appears to be reacting to events, rather than carrying out a strategy with specific goals and standards by which to measure progress. When things don't go the way we expect, we lose patience and try something different. When we lose confidence, we try something rash. When threatened, we overreact. When not threatened, we lose interest.

So, today, Americans are numbed by a plethora of proposals and counterproposals based on the contradictory views of various experts and witnesses. Americans are confused by the strength of Administration rhetoric and the absence of Administration action. They are confused by congressional procrastination, argument, and lack of consistency. They are looking for something we have seldom brought to Central American policy -- coherence and a sense of vision.

We largely ignored events in Central American until the Nicaraguan people overthrew the Somoza regime, and shortly thereafter the Salvadoran military deposed General Romero in a reformist coup. Then, when we tried to react, we found that our policy was defined by a host of after-thoughts posing as Congressional amendments. Instead of crafting an integrated policy, we adopted a series of policy fragments. We looked at the region through a kaleidoscope, which offers different views when turned to the right or the left, and not a telescope.

We adopted the Helms amendment prohibiting the use of American foreign aid in support of land reform. We adopted the Dodd amendment which demanded a regular paper exercise on behalf of human rights. We adopted the Boland amendment which tried to link tangible assistance to the intangible motives of the Nicaraguan opposition. And when we found that this was fruitless, we adopted Section 8066 of the Continuing Resolution, which holds American action hostage to an ill-timed vote on an ill-planned program in support of a policy which no one understands.

I submit to you today that we can no longer afford a kaleidoscopic approach to foreign policy.

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If Central America is important to this nation's future -- and it is -- then it is time for the public, the Congress, and the Executive Branch to begin shaping a long-term affirmative policy. We need to stop confusing instruments with ends; intentions with accomplishments; rhetoric with reality; and Congressional micromanagement with Congressional oversight. We need instead to ask ourselves what is happening today in Central America, what is likely to happen tomorrow, what we would like to see happen in the future, and what we can do about it.

Perhaps the place to start is with the democratic revolution which is being carried out every day throughout Latin America by millions of people who are demanding, and obtaining, the political and economic rights which they have long been denied.

Today no repressive government can remain in power in Central America unless it receives outside support. But equally, no democratic movement can flourish in Central America unless it receives outside support. Much of that support must come from the Latin American democracies themselves. They cannot be detached observers -- critical or non-committal in public, yet supportive in private. They must participate in the democratic revolution for they will benefit the most from its success and suffer the most from its failure.

When I first went to Central America 12 years ago, only Costa Rica had a functioning democracy and a tradition of social justice. Today, Costa Rica is not alone. Panama, Honduras, and El Salvador have democratically-elected civilian governments that have made major progress in eliminating a legacy of injustice, economic stagnation, and the arbitrary exercise of power. Even in Guatemala, a country which for years stood apart because of its feudal brutality, there are clear signs of progress, and Presidential elections are scheduled for October.

At the same time, these developments are not irreversible. El Salvador's respected President, Jose Napoleon Duarte, must contend with the remnants of yesterday's rightist dictatorship, while fighting the insurgency of the left. President Suazo of Honduras, though not significantly threatened by the left, is facing deteriorating economic conditions which may create uncontrollable pressure on his government. The Hondurans must also resolve the dilemma of strengthening a military which offers protection against the Marxists to the south but which poses a threat to democracy in its own right. Costa Rica's economy has been ravaged by the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979, by a decline in the terms of trade, by the burden of harboring thousands of refugees from Nicaragua, and by the government's historic generosity. In Panama, economic conditions are precarious and democracy is threatened by a nascent Marxist movement waiting on stage left and the prospect of a reactionary military waiting on stage right.

The question facing the American people today is whether we ignore these realities or act concert with others to help the emerging democracies strengthen themselves. In the past, we fought change; now we must decide whether to ignore it or to bolster it. The old style military governments are evolving into democracy. The Marxist insurgencies are losing.

In every country but one, the democratic revolution is being carried out, however precariously. That country is Nicaragua.

The Sandinista National Directorate has stolen a democratic revolution from the citizens of Nicaragua as surely as the Bolsheviks stole the Russian revolution against the Czar. It has set out on a course of subversion abroad and repression at home which has disturbed and frightened democratic leaders throughout the region.

Nicaragua is a throwback to the old pattern. Today, as in 1979, the government faces international hostility, economic disaster, a population grown restive, and an increasing threat from a military insurgency supported by a democratic opposition. So if we are consistent in our support for a democratic revolution, we should see Nicaragua for what it is -- another Central American dictatorship or which is doomed to failure unless it is kept alive by outside help.

The fundamental question, therefore, is whether we believe that the democratic revolution should move forward throughout Central America. If so, we must ask ourselves where the obstacles to this movement are found. One place is Managua, where a government is bent on throttling the democratic revolution at home and reversing it in the neighboring states.

Inside Nicaragua, the Sandinista National Directorate is resorting to ever greater forms of control and repression. Food is rationed by FSLN block committees. The behavior and beliefs of every citizen are subject to close monitoring to ensure that there is no deviation from the party line. Censorship, forced relocation, and orchestrated mob behavior are further divorcing the people from the Sandinistas. The list of exiles therefore grows bigger every day.

Nicaragua's behavior toward others is no better. Nicaragua is providing material, financial, and political support to insurgents in El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala. This support takes the form of arms, ammunition, communications coordination, logistics, training, propaganda, medical assistance, and advice. In addition, Nicaragua poses a direct military threat to her neighbors in Central America with an arsenal which exceeds those of all the other Central American countries combined. Finally, the emerging client relationship between Nicaragua and the Soviet-Cuban axis represents a potential strategic and tactical threat to the United States.

That's why the United States has persistently raised four points with the Sandinistas in its bilateral talks at Manzanillo. These are the same points which lie at the heart of the multi-lateral Contadora negotiations.

First, we want Nicaragua to cease its support for insurgencies in other countries.

Second, we want the National Directorate to adhere to the principles of the OAS Charter, and to honor the promises they made in 1979 in return for OAS recognition as a transitional government.

Third, we want Nicaragua to reduce the size of its military to parity with that of its neighbors, and to refrain altogether from obtaining or seeking advanced military technology. The economies in Central America cannot afford an arms race spurred

by a Nicaraguan bid for hegemony. But the democracies in Central America cannot thrive in the face of a military threat from a state which, unlike Cuba, is located in the heart of their small isthmus.

Finally, we want to see a reduction in Nicaraguan dependence on the Soviets, the Cubans, and clients like the PLO or Libya. Neither this nation nor any other nation in the hemisphere can tolerate another Soviet military outpost.

As important as these four points are, they do not comprise a genuine foreign policy. Instead, they represent problems which need an immediate solution. In other words, we find ourselves once again reacting after the fact to events which appear beyond our control. What we need is a comprehensive policy which can provide a road map for the future.

Thus far, the Administration has failed to provide such a road map. True, it has repeatedly announced three concrete goals which lie at the heart of its monetary requests to Congress: support for democracy against insurgency; economic assistance to help stabilize declining economies; and military assistance to contain the Nicaraguan threat. But these are only short-term reactions to immediate and visible threats. They do not tell us what we want the future to look like and because of that, programs and proposals which should be evaluated in terms of their contribution to progress become debated as ends in themselves.

We are not demonstrably undertaking a significant, long-term and supportable policy which will define the United States role in Central America for the future. And the role played by President Reagan in this issue only contributes to the difficulty.

The President has spoken to the public a number of times about Central America. Until recently, however, he has done so only in terms of such issues as the so called "feet people". He has not made clear the affirmative policy which we should adopt, but instead has spoken only in terms of what we should oppose.

As a result, the President himself has to some degree become the issue. The President is usually seen as the source of foreign policy. Congress, therefore, debates, supports or refutes a man, not a policy. But the true issue here is a long-term strategy and higher-order goals, not the elections in 1986 or 1988.

Clearly, it is not the obligation of Congress to develop such a policy. That is the responsibility of the Executive Branch, and it is the Executive Branch which is far better prepared to undertake such detailed work. But unless a genuine policy is developed -- soon and well -- the Executive will leave itself open to defeat by a Congress which will begin to impose artificial restraints on this country. We cannot afford kaleidoscopic micro-management of the sort that gave us the Clark Amendment, the artificial box-checking exercise of human rights certification, or the fencing of funding which was appropriated for the CIA.

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The vacuum created by the failure to elaborate an affirmative policy has led to the ridiculous spectacle of alternative visits to our Congress and our communities by the FSLN and the FDN in a protracted morality play designed to gain short-term propaganda advantages. In Nicaragua, they know there is no real US policy, and all sides are therefore engaged in a form of ritualized theatrics designed to create one by default.

It is time for this government to take charge of its own policy. What we must begin to do is to establish some guiding principles. These principles can provide a context for debate, and establish standards by which we can measure success. It is vital that such a policy be directed uniformly toward all of Central America, and not just the country which attracts our attention at the moment. Central America is a tightly interdependent region, and the democratic revolution cannot succeed if it is hampered in any country, whether because of leftist or rightist repression. We must build into our policy the elements of consistency, accountability, credibility, and consonance with law which we demand of a foreign policy elsewhere. And above all else, we should not confuse the instruments of policy with policy itself.

I believe that our policy should be shaped by six general principles.

The first principle: We must recognize that a long-term commitment to policy requires the active support of the public and its Congress. This means that a policy must be built on an affirmative vision of the future, and must avoid senseless confrontation over peripheral issues like the paramilitary program. If the President makes a \$14 million program the centerpiece of his policy, he will only stoke the fires of controversy in this country. Win or lose, the game will ultimately be the Sandinista's, not ours.

The previous formula for covert assistance is simply at a dead end. The dispute between Congress and the Administration has been over whether money should be appropriated to resume covert, military support of the Nicaraguan insurgents. Congress won't be party to the illogical and illegal absurdity of pretending that we are not providing military assistance when it is widely and publicly known that we are.

The insistence on covert aid convinces the Central Americans that we are not openly committed to our objectives and, therefore, not steadfast. Moreover, the American people don't understand why we have to act in an underhanded way if our policy objectives are right. Finally, it is not clear why covert aid is the critical action upon which our policy must stand or fall. The controversy is joined on the wrong issue -- the method rather than the goal of supporting the FDN--and a negative vote on that issue implies, incorrectly, that Congress and the Administration are not in agreement on the need to oppose the Sandanistas and all they stand for. Confrontation should be in Managua, not in Washington.

The second principle: Our policy must have the element of credibility which comes from an evident willingness to undertake difficult, and potentially expensive actions. Without credibility, our actions raise doubts and questions.

There is considerable hand-wringing about the arms buildup in Nicaragua, but it continues. Why, people must ask, do we permit it? Surely, \$14 million in covert aid to the FDN is not going to make any difference. We assert that MG-21s will not be permitted, yet the construction of Puente Huete Airfield continues, and we permit the deployment of sophisticated MI-24 helicopters. Have we drawn a line on military equipment? If so, where? If not, why not?

Equally, we claim to support the democratic opposition in Nicaragua. If so, people must ask, where is the tangible sign of that support? If we oppose the regime in Managua, why do we buy Nicaraguan beef and bananas when Honduras could use our trade? And if we truly feel that the Sandinistas have lost their legitimacy because of their failure to adhere to the conditions for their recognition by the OAS, why do we continue diplomatic relations?

Thus far, our rhetoric has vastly exceeded our actions. The longer this continues, the more certain that nobody--democratically or Sandinista ideologue--will believe that the U.S. is serious about defending its interest in the short-term or advancing them in the long.

The third principle: We should make greater use of the economic tools at our disposal. Our greatest resource is not our ability to arm people, but to feed them, and to help them develop sound and growing economies.

To this day, we continue to let protectionism dominate our dealings with the Central American economies. We continue to parcel out humanitarian and development assistance in small and infrequent doses. We continue to focus on the short-term gain, not the long-term good.

Economic stability goes hand in hand with political stability. The sounder a nation's economy, the more it can resist aggression or subversion. It is in our own national interest to make a significant commitment to economic development in Central America.

We have the economic capacity, the strategic interest, and the plan of action to do so. But rather than moving ahead with the urgently-needed Jackson Plan, Congress has wasted its time and undercut our credibility by engaging in kaleidoscopic policy--making with a string of haphazard amendments. It is time to move forward on the Jackson Plan, and to quit distracting ourselves with targets of political opportunity.

The fourth principle: We must make clear that our support for the democratic revolution means that we are willing to live with diversity so long as a nation's core values involve a commitment to the democratic process.

Policy disagreements among democracies are ultimately less important than their adherence to common values. Our relations with many genuine democracies have occasionally been strained. But at no time have we had a fundamental disagreement over vital and core issues with a true democracy. All democracies have a strong community of interest against tyranny, and it is tyranny in its most naked form that we spend billions each year to deter.

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Governments do not have to look like ours to be democratic, nor do they have to sign off on the U.S. policy line. Yet too often in the past, we have signalled that by "democratic," we mean only pro-U.S. and anti-communist. Too often, we have failed to support social justice when the basic choice has been between reform and tyranny.

If the Sandinistas adjust their policies in the ways we have outlined at Manzanillo and elsewhere, and manifest a commitment to the democratic process, we should be willing to develop close and supportive ties with Nicaragua. But we should also be prepared to isolate Nicaragua if the Sandinistas continue on a collision course with their neighbors. Recently, the UNIR offered to lay down its arms and undertake unconditional talks on national reconciliation, with the Church acting as mediator. This could be the Nicaraguan counterpart to President Duarte's dramatic meeting at La Palma, and could represent the start of a process of democratization. The response of the Sandinista National Directorate should shape our policy decisions.

The fifth principle: Any policy which we undertake, must be predicated on Central American unity and leadership. This is not our struggle alone, and if we attempt to make it so we are due for frustration.

It is time for those who have undertaken the democratic revolution to stand up for the principles of democracy throughout the region. If the nations of Central America do not act together, they risk collapsing one by one. The region is tightly interdependent, and it cannot continue the democratic revolution, unless it acts in a united way.

It is understandable, given the long history of US neglect, that the democracies would be reluctant to take the lead in a policy designed to bring to Nicaragua the processes which have taken root in Costa Rica and elsewhere. Nobody would want to risk further intimidation by Nicaragua in a hopeless quest. So it is vital that the United States make clear that, if the nations of the region undertake collective action, we will meet our obligations under the OAS Charter and the Rio Treaty.

Regional collective action is a tool we have simply overlooked thus far, preferring to rely on unilateral programs and declarations. Article 25 of the OAS Charter, and Articles 6 and 8 of the Rio Pact, provide a sound legal and diplomatic basis for individual and collective action against a country which engages in either direct military incursion or in aggression by indirect means. A reliance on these principles and provisions will make clear that the problem is real, and not simply an ideological difference between Republicans and Sandinistas.

Moreover, a declaration of collective action makes clear that it is Latins themselves, and not the Yanquis, who are concerned. We cannot afford to revive the image of the colossus to the north. And I am certain that political leaders like Presidents Duarte and Monge are far more effective in obtaining US support than the parade of FDN military commanders who have recently come through Washington.



The sixth, and last, principle: We should be cautious about reliance on tools that can only support a political goal, not define one. Two such tools are military action and negotiations.

We should demonstrate that our commitment to the region is political and durable. As part of that commitment, we should make clear our willingness to provide military assistance in accordance with our Rio Pact obligations, but only as requested by the Rio Pact members themselves. We should avoid the unilateral impulse to push until somebody yells "uncle". Military action should never be ruled out. But no such action can be undertaken without a clear consensus in this country and in the region.

Equally, we must keep open the door to negotiations with the government of Nicaragua, but we must realize that in every case, bilaterally and unilaterally, they have negotiated with a cynical and unproductive attitude. We can no longer base our policy on an assumption that the Sandinistas have a motivation or inclination to willingly cede any of their objectives, inside or outside their country. We must understand that their objective remains consolidation of power -- an objective they will not willingly concede through negotiations unless our diplomacy is framed in terms of a clear enunciation of our long-term goals, and backed by sufficient strength to express our will.

In summary, no element of policy -- whether economic assistance or covert action -- can be intelligently discusses unless we have first decided upon the broad principles we are seeking to advance. Only then can our debate about Central America cease to be artificial and artificially narrow.

It is unusual that the Chairman of the Intelligence Committee should address these points, for customarily intelligence is supposed to inform the policy-maker, not shape policy. But the means chosen by the Administration to pursue policy in Central America have thrust both the CIA and the oversight committees with the public debate. We can return to our traditional roles when we are offered a policy to support.